

THE REORGANIZATION OF THE NURSES' ASSOCIATED ALUMNÆ

By ANNIE DAMER

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It is not given to many of us both to sow the seed and to see the harvest gathered in, but those who planted the seed of a national organization for nurses seven years ago can already contemplate the waving fields, if not the full corn in the ear.

One period of our life as an organization has passed from childhood into youth, and we desire now to put away childish things, to take a broader outlook, and to voice more strongly our views on matters of professional and public importance. Nurses live naturally an isolated life, and lose all feeling of kinship if there is not some common bond of interest to unite them. The school alumnae first drew its graduates together and made one class known to the other. The awe-stricken probationer, who had looked with due reverence on the ex-head nurse just fitting off the hospital stage as she stepped on, found her in the entanglement of parliamentary debate a woman much like herself. As the recognition of sisterly interest grew, that of the community developed, and from the many by-paths the sisters of different stripes and caps wandered into a common fold, where perchance even now some of us look askance at one another, and because the cap with two folds is worn instead of the cap with one, or because some were pastured on the mountain instead of by the sea, we still have a feeling of estrangement.

We were fortunate in having good leaders in those early days, wise women who saw the need of combination, that the strong might help the weak, and that both might feel the force and inspiration that come from a common devotion and striving after an ideal. What was that ideal? Has the standard set up seven years ago been lowered, or carried forward always in the forefront? Do we demand less or more of our members or of the nursing profession? Positive forces have been at work making for what is best and highest in our education and organization, and much of the result seen in its growth, both in numbers and strength, is due to the enthusiasm, devotion, and self-sacrifice of those early seedsowers.

In our fuller development we realize that much of our machinery has become cumbersome and antiquated, some of it we have never made use of.

That awesome Judicial Council, formidable as the Court of the Inquisition, where have its silent sessions been held? Has no member ever

violated the Code of Ethics or had a dispute with another member? But perhaps the council has been composed of parliamentarians and has required all charges and complaints to be preferred formally in writing, and while the complainant has been slowly and deliberately attempting to formulate her charge with pencil and paper the council has adjourned.

The Board of Control has a name which smacks too much in these days of legislative control, so we will have none of it in name, as we have not had in reality.

Our State societies have not organized when there were three eligible societies in the State, and although alumnae members have been in the forefront of all State organizations, the trend has been towards organization independently of the national association.

For two years now much of the time at our alumnae meeting has been consumed in discussion of questions of vital importance to us as a national organization. The doing away with the unnecessary has been simple enough, and the revision of by-laws which refer to our ordinary parliamentary procedure and the expedition of business has occupied little time or thought, for the necessity of so doing had already been demonstrated.

A question has arisen as to the advisability of admitting other organizations than those connected with the training-school—Shall the association be confined, as formerly, to nurse alumnae associations, or shall the interest also of those who, severed by distance, are never able to attend the meetings of their own alumnae, be considered. These local associations, probably, will never be numerous, and until the system of registration of nurses is completed, if not uniform, all over the country, and registered nurses organized into county societies as a part of the State society, it in turn forming a division of the national body, we shall have to continue as an organization of federated clubs. These local associations of nurses, if holding the same standard, should certainly be entitled to affiliation. There is nothing either in our name or constitution to prevent it. These associations would bring in an element which would be essentially helpful. In them the individual nurse learns more quickly and effectively the true professional idea, and though her heart may beat as loyally as ever for her Alma Mater, she is judged there by her ability and qualifications as a woman and a nurse, and not by the standing of her school.

Our two years in the hospital marks the culmination of our educational training—our true university life. In the broad outlook which that life should give, if we have the true university spirit, let us not look loftily either on the local association or the small hospital alumnae which has the true nursing university spirit. All associations which

are striving for the uplift of the profession and the raising of our educational standards should receive recognition. We may have vague ideas as to what we wish to accomplish, but the mere fact of joining the association stands as a protest, however weak, against the materialistic tendency of our age, as common among nurses as among ordinary mortals, and the payment of the two dollars yearly dues is just that much a weakening of the spirit of utilitarianism and selfishness.

What place should the State association have in our reorganized society? The original idea of the State association being a union of alumnae associations has not been carried out, or only in a partial way, in some of the States which have organized. But it is important that there should be some form of affiliation with the national. It is not our province here to discuss the work to be undertaken by the State societies or the nature of their organization, but the best means of coördinating their work and of establishing a common platform where the problems which confront us all alike can be intelligently and unitedly discussed, and where we may unite and strengthen the efforts for professional improvement.

One way for the State association to be affiliated would be for it to come in on the same terms as the alumnae society, as an individual club, with exactly the same standing and representation, but the State associations, with their duplicate memberships, comprising, as they do, the majority of the members of the alumnae societies, who have joined either individually or in a body, could hardly be received on the numerical plan—entitled to a delegate for every fifty members. It would lead to endless confusion in the effort to determine what representation each association was entitled to in order to prevent cumulative voting.

On this method of representation it would seem better not to consider the affiliation of the State societies with the national body.

Another way would be the "one club, one vote" principle, the truly democratic plan, giving the small club the same representation as the large one, and the large one no more authority than the small one. Each association would pay a fixed sum yearly into the treasury regardless of its size, a plan which might appeal to the larger societies, but would hardly be feasible unless we had several hundred affiliated societies, as the small clubs would not be able to bear any additional taxation.

If the Associated Alumnae is not prepared to admit all societies, large and small, on the same terms, and the difficulty of ascertaining the proper representation according to members not already included in the alumnae reckoning appears insurmountable, there still remains another plan. Each affiliated State society might be allowed a certain number of delegates at large, one or more, as the national society might

determine, each State society paying a fixed sum yearly into the national treasury, with the local association sending delegates as heretofore, according to their size, one delegate for every fifty members, and contributing proportionately.

The balance of power would remain in the hands of the *alumnæ* society, yet the State society as an organization would be represented separately.

A State chairman or secretary might be appointed by the Associated *Alumnæ* for each State, who would report matters of interest and progress in her State, and whose attitude towards the State association would be not one of dictation or authority, but of suggestion and inspiration.

She could also present to the Associated *Alumnæ* recommendations on important matters discussed at the State meetings and put into a condensed form after due deliberation. These would carry more weight than the recommendation of a single association, and less time would be wasted over discussion on unimportant points of a question.

A few words regarding our by-laws, which have been under discussion for the past two years, many of them passed upon as meeting our approval but not formally accepted. It is very desirable that there be no further delay, and that we shall leave the Philadelphia meeting with a good working constitution, satisfactory to all.

As to eligibility and membership, would it not be well to state that a society should be in existence for at least a year before being admitted, and have an active membership not fewer than —?

It also should be stated to whom application must be made—to the Board of Directors through the corresponding secretary, an important and necessary officer in our large constituency and one not yet provided for.

We need a Board of Directors, but it hardly seems wise to permit these positions to be held by the State presidents, elected by a separate body at separate meetings. The national association should elect its own officers. These may be chosen to represent each affiliated State, but should be the choice of the national body at its own election. It might be desirable, also, to state the length of the term of office.

"If holding office is an honor, it should be passed around; if it is a burden, it should be shared." Under our present system an officer continues from year to year very often against her own wishes and inclination; she does not wish to appear to shirk, and the voting members do not wish to appear as if they were dissatisfied.

If we stated in our by-laws that the term of office should be two years, or one, and that no officer or member of the Board of Directors should be eligible for two consecutive terms, it would be less difficult

to secure candidates, and the honors and burdens would be more equally distributed over the different societies of the country. A certain number of the Board of Directors might be retired each year if the term of office were two years.

A different plan of voting might also be arranged for—that the elections should take place in a separate room with the polls open for a certain number of hours, thereby not delaying the programme or business of the convention.

It would be desirable to incorporate a by-law with reference to the expenses of officers, whether or not any officer shall be salaried, and whether officers incurring expenses in the service of the association shall be reimbursed or bear them themselves.

No officer of the national association should be sent as a delegate from her *alumnæ* association. It is not possible to grant two elective offices to one person.

These are only a few of the points which suggest themselves which were not brought out at the last annual meeting. It is hoped the delegates will come to the next prepared to adopt a constitution which shall be our rule of guidance for the expedition of business for some time to come. Then let every woman “have a mind to work.”

THE THOMAS WILSON SANITARIUM FOR THE SICK CHILDREN OF BALTIMORE

By J. H. MASON KNOX, JR., M.D.
Physician in Charge

DURING the last few years in many of our large cities much additional interest has been aroused in the problems having to do with the care of infants, including the prevention and treatment of their diseases. The large death-rate among these little people, particularly during the summer heat, has lately only received an attention on the part of the medical profession and the public at all commensurate with its importance. The endeavors to secure pure milk and better housing accommodations for the poor of crowded communities are being multiplied and are saving many lives.

At the Thomas Wilson Sanitarium for Sick Children situated near Baltimore, devoted largely to the care of infants suffering from intestinal diseases prevalent during the summer, the work has been naturally developed along two lines. First and most important, it was sought to take the best possible care of the patients committed to the sanitarium,